Follow the wolves. Reflections on ethnographic tracing and tracking

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Follow the wolves

Reflections on Ethnographic Tracing and Tracking

Wolves have been back in Switzerland for more than 20 years. We look at this return in the research project "Wolves: Knowledge and Practice"[1] as a cultural and social process and examine how society deals with nature – or more precisely: How society deals with various natures differently. Our aim is to understand the variety of positions regarding and practical ways of dealing with wolves against the backdrop of the respective life and working worlds. My subproject focuses on extended contexts that do not belong to wolf management in a narrow sense (i.e. the official, institutionalized administration of wolves) and are not perceived as constituting the immediate core conflict of agriculture vs. nature conservation. I ask about negotiations and debates that Swiss society is having in the course of the return of wolves in these extended contexts.

As the returning wolves are moving from the neighboring Italian and French Alps to Switzerland, the country's main focus of wolf presence so far has been its mountain regions. That is why the current role of and future visions for the alpine regions form an important part in the discussions on wolves in Switzerland. This is certainly intensifying debates and controversies, as in the Alps, the wolves come upon a terrain that is sensitive in not only an ecological but also a social and ideological way: Modern societies have been projecting hopes and longings onto the Alps for decades and they hold a specific role in Swiss cultural memory, politics and self-conception (Risi 2011; Tschofen 2017). In many other aspects, the debates and discussions on the currently about 50 wolves in Switzerland (KORA 2019) resemble those in other countries in western and central Europe where wolves have been returning or spreading in larger numbers in the last few decades: Identity and tradition, heteronomy and autonomy, biosecurity and biodiversity, the relationships between peripheral regions and urban centers of power, of local people and state authorities, and the question of an 'up-to-date' way of dealing with and relating to 'nature.'

What comes into focus in our research project is a multilayered, emergent, hybrid, network-like formation of human and nonhuman actors, institutions, discourses, objects, values, policies, places, sites and situations that we call 'wolf management.' We understand the latter explicitly as exceeding the professional administration of wolves in the well-established

1 The research project "Wolves: Knowledge and Practice. Ethnographies on the Return of Wolves in Switzerland" (project leader: Bernhard Tschofen; project staff: Nikolaus Heinzer and Elisa Frank; project number: 162469) at the Department of Social Anthropology and Popular Cultural Studies, University of Zurich, is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. – I thank all my field partners for letting me participate in their thoughts and practices. Thanks to Marlis Heyer, Irina Arnold, Bernhard Tschofen and Nikolaus Heinzer for helpful comments on the text, and to Philip Saunders for the proofreading.

wildlife management of official authorities and to comprise as well less obvious areas, such as tourism, waste management or taxidermy, and a large number of individual, popular and everyday dealings with wolves, also by those people who come into contact with wolves and their presence in a more indirect way than, for example, sheep breeders or hunters. This understanding of 'wolf management' allows us not to generalize the return of wolves as a mere conflict of interests between nature conservation and agriculture but to approach the totality of the returning process and the positions of various people that can barely be reduced to a simple pro- and contra-schema.

One possibility of grasping the formation to which our research is directed is the concept of 'assemblage.' In the words of European ethnologists Sabine Hess and Vassilis Tsianos, this term describes "a contingent ordering of radically heterogeneous practices and things"[2] (2010: 254). The basic condition for doing ethnographic fieldwork in assemblages is, according to Hess and her colleague Maria Schwertl, to understand the field as "a praxeological construction of researchers" (2013: 32) with boundaries that need to be considered and reconsidered continually. Consequently, what is required is "a research design [...] that no longer can pretend that its research object is simply found 'outside' empiristically," instead, designing your field is "an epistemologically instructed practice of construction" as Hess and Tsianos (2010: 253) write.

Doing fieldwork in assemblages is a methodical challenge. There is no clearly enclosed 'overviewable' and, in this sense, no 'manageable' field in which the ethnographer can move and gain the impression that it is feasible to fully research it. While this is valid for our whole project (and maybe ethnographic research projects in general), I would, however, claim that this challenge arises in a particular way in my subproject, as I am focusing on the area exceeding the original wolf management and core conflict – and this area, one may get the impression, can be expanded and extended potentially almost endlessly. How to construct, define and deliminate my field is, therefore, a question I have been dealing with. To get an answer to this question, I make use of an approach, among others, that has been described by American anthropologist George Marcus (1995) as multi-sited ethnography and that Hess and Tsianos explicitly mention as an approach that is capable of translating a study in an assemblage-like texture into concrete research activity (2010: 259).

Multi-sited Ethnography

Marcus laid the foundations in his article "Ethnography in/of the world system: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography" (1995), in the course of globalization, for an alternative to the conventional single-site research, i.e. the stationary fieldwork in one location. Multi-sited ethnography – the term makes it obvious – looks at more than one site. Moreover, Marcus understands 'site' explicitly not only as a place that can be located on a map (1995: 104 f.). According to this understanding, a non-local institution, such as an administrative regime or

2 If not indicated otherwise, all the quotations in this paper (those of my interviewees, from my participant observation records as well as cited articles and literature) that are not in English in the original have been translated by the author.

the Facebook site of an association skeptical or well-disposed towards wolves, can also be a site of research.

Multi-sited ethnography, in Marcus' words, is directed at a "cultural formation, produced in several different locales" (1995: 99). The approach aims at

> putting questions to an emergent object of study whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand, but are themselves a contribution of making an account that has different, complexly connected real-world sites of investigation. The object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated (Marcus 1995: 102).

Thus, multi-sited ethnography is not about doing comparative research in several places; it is not just about a spatial-geographical or social-vertical (e.g. in the sense of studying up) widening of the field. The crucial point Marcus makes with his concept of multi-sited ethnography is to understand 'research' and 'the field' in terms of design: "[T]he field and the research object itself only come into being [...] in the course of the study, according to the researched networks and figurations" as Hess and Tsianos (2010: 259) paraphrase Marcus' idea (cf. also Marcus 1995: 101 f., 2009; Hess and Schwertl 2013: 27 f.).

The concrete clue Marcus provides to carry out a multi-sited ethnography is that the researcher should *follow* something: You may *follow* people, things, metaphors, stories, biographies, conflicts, etc. (Marcus 1995; cf. also Hess and Tsianos 2010: 259; Welz 1998: 183 f.). Therefore, tracing and tracking the one thing to be *followed* is the "mode of constructing the space of investigation" (Marcus 1995: 108) in a multi-sited ethnography. In correspondence to this research practice of *following* something, what is of interest in a multi-sited ethnography is especially to connect the multiple sites and to think in relations: "Multi-sited research is designed around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions [...] with an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites that in fact defines the argument of the ethnography" (Marcus 1995: 105).

Leit-Wölfe

I adapted multi-sited ethnography for my research by developing a tool that I call (in German) '*Leit-Wölfe,*' as a working term. This tool will help me to carry out my project in the assemblage-like texture of wolf management in extended contexts.

At the very beginning of my research, in order to enter the field, I defined three areas in the wolf management network that – regarding the whole project – were more likely to fall into my area of responsibility: Environmental education, media and a third part that I called 'politics – (public) administration – interest groups.' I started an open, unstructured nosing around in all three areas. Cultural anthropologist Rolf Lindner describes this research practice of nosing around (1990: 9–12; Massmünster 2017: 47) as a concrete operationalization of the ethnographic *Kulturanalyse*. *Kulturanalyse* (Egger 2014; Lindner 2003; Massmünster 2017: 44–62) is, in addition to multi-sited ethnography, another approach upon which I base my research and the developed tool of the Leit-Wölfe. *Kulturanalyse* is similar to multi-sited ethnography in its constructivist understanding of the field, in its thinking in relations and its interest in connections between different sites, as well as in its suggestions to trace and track things.

While nosing around in the three areas mentioned above – i.e. starting to collect ethnographic material, conducting first interviews and doing some participant observation – I made a list of potential actors, sites and situations for further ethnographic encounters. This list became longer and longer, the potential field grew continuously more multilayered – and with that, increasingly emergent, contingent, blurred and vague. That was the moment I came back to multi-sited ethnography as an approach that allows ethnographic research to be done in assemblages. However, I had to adapt Marcus' clue to *follow* something: I realized that what I had been doing while nosing around was nothing else than '*follow* the wolf' – and that in doing so, I had ended up with the feeling that this leads me everywhere and nowhere. That is why I translated Marcus' suggestion into practice by not following the wolf but *several* wolves. I call these wolves that I *follow* '*Leit*-Wölfe' (translated into English hereafter as *Leit*-wolf, respectively *Leit*-wolves). 'Leitwolf' (as one word) in German stands in the biological sense for the leader wolf of a pack but is also used in a figurative sense to describe a leader, for example, the captain of a soccer team. Using the expression '*Leit*-wolf' (with hyphen), I try to capture the idea of these wolves to guide or to lead me through my vast potential field of study – leiten in German meaning to lead, to conduct, to guide. I inserted a hyphen: '*Leit*-wolf' to avoid confusion with the biologically and figuratively used expression 'Leitwolf' and to underline that it is a methodical tool that I developed.[3]

The *Leit*-wolves I identified and constructed after I first nosed around in some sites of my vast potential field and that I am *following* now refer to constellations that seem to be significant for the questions I ask in my project. The *Leit*-wolves – that is my intention – allow me to *follow* and deepen these seemingly significant constellations, to generate more and hopefully revelatory data about them, as I can *track* the *Leit*-wolves to various sites where they are negotiated. The *Leit*-wolves appear in quite different guises: Some derive from concrete individual animals living in the wild in Switzerland, while others reflect more or less established wolf figures or narratives. All the *Leit*-wolves are connected to free-living, 'real' wolves (and their doings), but they are not identical with these animals: The *Leit*-wolf 'the Uri wolf (M68)' derives from a 'real' physical wolf that killed sheep in the canton of Uri in 2016; or the *Leit*-wolf 'the forestry assistant' is connected with the wolves preying on red and roe deer in Swiss forests. However, the *Leit*-wolves differ from these animal actors, as they point to a whole cluster of various actors, sites and practices (of which the physical, living animals are only one crucial element). The methodical tool of the *Leit*-wolf enables me to examine these clusters, i.e. to detect and to grasp ethnographically concrete experiences and situations that are related to them. Cultural anthropologist Michel Massmünster points out this advantage when tracing and tracking something: "To follow connections offers the chance to start from concrete experiences" (2017: 60; cf. also Hess and Tsianos 2010: 256). The various sites the *Leit*-wolves guide me to require different research methods, such as participant observation, qualitative interviews

3 I am grateful to Bernhard Tschofen for this advice.

or document analysis. Marcus mentions explicitly that a multi-sited ethnography is normally multi-methodical (1995: 108) and he points out that not all sites need to be researched with the same fieldwork intensity in a multi-sited ethnography (1995: 100, 108).
There are four *Leit*-wolves or *Leit*-wolf groups I am currently working on and with:

– M44, the Uri wolf (M68), the Calanda wolves[4]
– the Lötschental, the Valais/Grisons, the Walser, the Swiss, the European, etc., wolf
– the forestry assistant
– the wolf in dogskin.

In what follows, I will give some insights into the way I work with the tool of the Leit-wolves by focusing on one methodical aspect for each *Leit*-wolf (group).

M44, the Uri Wolf (M68), the Calanda Wolves: Reflecting on the Construction of a *Leit*-wolf as an Analytical Chance

Regarding this *Leit*-wolf-group, I discuss in what way reflecting on my construction of a *Leit*-wolf offers a possibility of getting analytical insights.

The first *Leit*-wolf of this group I created was 'M44'. While nosing around in the area of environmental education, I visited Swiss natural history museums and started getting interested in the taxidermied wolves I encountered there. Subsequently, I talked to some taxidermists who had recently mounted or were mounting wolves at that time. One of them was freelance taxidermist Sabrina Beutler. She had already written in her first e-mail that the wolf she had to deal with was M44. When we first met, she told me in detail about M44's afterlife. I thought this to be a significant story that a free-living Swiss wolf after its death – it was shot illegally in the Domleschg valley in the Grisons – initially undergoes several pathological and genetic examinations and, finally, is presented as a preserved specimen in a museum, instead of, for example, ending up in a carcass collecting point. That is why I decided to follow the afterlife of this wolf and created Leit-wolf 'M44' to do so.

The *Leit*-wolf 'the Uri wolf (M68)' resulted from the *Leit*-wolf 'M44.' In the summer of 2016, after having killed more than 50 sheep in the canton of Uri in central Switzerland, M68 was legally shot by the local hunting authorities (Kanton Uri 2016). After having read about that, I got – sensitized by the already defined *Leit*-wolf 'M44' – in contact with the cantonal authorities to be able to *follow* this wolf's life after death, for example, in the taxidermy workshop and the Historic Museum Uri. I talked about "M68" on my first visit to the taxidermist. Initially, I did not notice that the taxidermist himself was not using this term. I only became aware of this when he, while showing me his specimen form, asked me: "And what did you call this wolf?" It was only at that moment – when the taxidermist then also wrote the name "M68" down on his form – that I realized that he always talked about the "Uri wolf" when denominating the dead animal.

4 M44 is the 44th male wolf that has been identified in Switzerland by DNA analysis since the return of the species; Uri is a canton in central Switzerland, and the Calanda is a massif in the east of Switzerland where in 2012, the first wolf pups since the extinction of the species were born.

This incident is exemplary of the way in which I, as a researcher, always denote and construct a *Leit*-wolf. I do not consider this to be a problem as long as I reflect on these constructions continuously. It is exactly such reflections that can generate analytical insights, as this example shows: That I denoted – at first – 'M68' as a *Leit*-wolf has a lot to do with Sabrina Beutler's telling me about M44. How Beutler talks and thinks about 'her' wolf – as a specific individual with its own biography that also continues after death – is very significant for her perception and dealings with the animal entrusted to her. Understanding M44 as an individual influences even her taxidermy practices very concretely:

Fig. 13 ***Materializing the 'Uri wolf (M68)'*** *in the taxidermy workshop, Photo Elisa Frank*

> In the case of M44, the technique used matches the significance of an individual that will never come to life again and is indeed irreplaceable. Thus, the animal's skin is tanned separately and not treated in a mass process – thrown together with some sheepskins, for example. The artificial corpus that provides the internal core of the preserved specimen is built by me from natural products that are durable. That is to say, I do not just use any artificial substance to hand without knowing if it will simply fall apart in 30 years' time. […] In these cases, I have more responsibility and have to guarantee that the preserved specimen will last for hundreds of years and will still make people aware of M44 in two hundred years' time. (Alpines Museum der Schweiz/Universität Zürich – ISEK 2017: 29, translated by Pauline Cumbers)[5]

5 The Swiss Alpine Museum in Bern organized the exhibition "Der Wolf ist da. Eine Menschenausstellung" ['The Wolf Is Here. An Exhibition about People'] from May 13 to October 1, 2017. The exhibition was a co-production of the Swiss Alpine Museum and our research project "Wolves: Knowledge and Practice" (see note 1). A central element of the exhibition were eight audio points where different experts whose jobs bring them into contact with wolves talked about their experiences, among them the taxidermist Sabrina Beutler. The audio points were produced by Michael T. Ganz after an intensive briefing by Nikolaus Heinzer and me, transcribed by Elena Lynch and translated into English by Pauline Cumbers. The transcripts in German can be read on Alpines Museum der Schweiz/Universität Zürich – ISEK (2017). I make use of this concise quote of the audio point here as my conversations with Beutler have not been recorded on tape but documented in the form of field notes and records taken from memory.

The examples of 'M44' and 'the Uri wolf (M68)' show in what way reflecting on the construction of a *Leit*-wolf may lead to analytical insights. Documenting the traces I create – in my case the *Leit*-wolves – may be very valuable, as it forces me to denote exactly why I think this trace to be revealing and, therefore, worth creating and *following*. Such reflections offer good occasions to do analytical work and generate insights in the terms of content. Social anthropologist Annuska Derks emphasizes in an article in which she *follows* the beehive coal briquette in Vietnam that one must always formulate in a multi-sited ethnography explicitly why exactly he or she thinks the thing he or she *follows* is revealing (2015: 332 f.).

The Lötschental, the Valais/Grisons, the Walser, the Swiss, the European, etc., Wolf: *Leit*-wolves as a Mode of Attention

On the basis of the next *Leit*-wolf group, I will elaborate on the trackability of *Leit*-wolves, that is, if a *Leit*-wolf needs to be made in a way that it immediately leads me somewhere, and if not, how it can alternatively be understood as a mode of attention. At the beginning, this *Leit*-wolf group only consisted of the pair 'the Valais and the Grisons wolf' and I will only refer to this pair in what follows.

The story that the dealings with wolves are different in the canton of Grisons than in the canton of Valais had already turned up – accompanied by various explanations – in the first field contacts my colleague Nikolaus Heinzer and I had. We soon noticed, therefore, that regional identities are apparently negotiated with the returning wolves: What makes the Valais into the Valais and the Grisons into the Grisons? Out of that, I created the *Leit*-wolf pair 'the Valais and the Grisons wolf' with the intention that this pair would guide me to sites and actors that may be revealing regarding this aspect. But that was not the case: I listed in a table all the data that I had already collected for each Leit-wolf and that I potentially could still gather *following* this *Leit*-wolf. When studying this 'fieldwork plan,' I noticed that I had used a very simple scheme for this *Leit*-wolf-pair: I had listed the Valais and the Grisons versions of various actor groups (such as local newspapers or natural history museums) and different incidents (such as poached wolves). When going through the interviews I had already conducted with some of the people on this 'fieldwork plan'

Fig. 14 ***The answer is "wolf": question card*** *["Which unpopular wild animal has been hunted mercilessly in the Valais since 2005 despite statutory prohibition?"] from a board game [BRAFF, Malcolm/CATHALA, Bruno/PAUCHON, Sébastien 2009: HELVETIQ. Das Spiel der Schweiz, Lausanne: RedCut SàRL] designed on the initiative of an applicant to the Swiss citizenship test*

while nosing around, I realized that, although the story 'Valais vs. Grisons' had been part of those conversations, the interviewees had been talking about other aspects most of the time. Above all, I could not imagine generating more statements about 'the Valais and the Grisons wolf' in such an interview (with the same or other people on my list) without contributing massively to the telling of this story myself. In time, it became increasingly clear to me that this *Leit*-wolf pair was not to be *followed* immediately, but that I had to understand it more as a mode of attention. It was by increasing my sensibility to the topic of regional identification through wolves that this *Leit*-wolf pair guided me to a few research sites, as the following example demonstrates.

The Open Air Gampel (OAG) is one of the biggest Swiss music festivals and takes place in the canton of Valais. An ibex had formed the logo of the festival since its foundation. In 2016, the ibex was replaced by a wolf. The official explanation for this exchange given by those organizing the festival was that the ibex is seen by Swiss people more as a Grisons animal (the ibex is, for example, part of the coat of arms of the Grisons). This replacement created a considerable stir and was discussed extensively online and in social media – perfectly serving its purpose as a PR campaign. In the debates about this wolf in the logo, very similar questions to those in the discussions on physical, free-living wolves were negotiated: How much can one insist on local conditions and characteristics or how much – on the contrary – one needs to arrange with the opinions and ideas of the rest of Switzerland and, therefore, to accept changes in its own territory (such as wild wolves living in the Valais or a wolf becoming part of the logo of the local music festival). I came across this story while reading some articles on 'real,' i.e. physical, free-living wolves on the website of the Upper Valais newspaper *Walliser Bote*. I immediately activated the research mode, i.e. I collected all the material I was able to find on this story (e.g. newspaper articles, the corresponding posts on the OAG's Facebook profile, including all the comments made online, a little video series the organizers had produced to explain the change in the logo) and started asking Valais people I interviewed or met informally about it and put the PR manager of the OAG on my interviewee list.

In this case, the *Leit*-wolf pair 'the Valais and the Grisons wolf' guided me to a new site that I would otherwise perhaps only have briefly laughed about as a funny anecdote. By providing me with an increased sensibility regarding stories about a specific Valais or Grisons way of dealing with wolves, this *Leit*-wolf pair made me – as in the case of the new OAG logo – activate the research mode as soon as I came across something evocative of this subject. This is – to speak in the words of cultural anthropologist Simone Egger – research "on call" (Egger 2014: 407). This kind of research requires one to be analytically attentive and is described by Egger and others as a central element of ethnographic *tracing* and *tracking*. Supposed flukes become in this regard "a consequence of analytical attention" (Massmünster 2017: 57).[6]

6 Cf. also Ehn and Löfgren (2010: 222), who stress the "cumulative and systematic dimensions" (2010: 218) of serendipity. On serendipity and attempts to influence it (e.g. by nosing around or "going into" a topic) cf. Lindner (2003, 2012).

The Forestry Assistant: Restricting the Field

Presenting the 'forestry assistant,' I discuss limiting or restricting the field with the help of the *Leit*-wolf tool developed. The decision to create a *Leit*-wolf is also a decision among many other potential ones.

One sector that I had defined at the beginning of my research as an area to do some nosing around was the complex of 'politics – (public) administration – interest groups.' The first thing I did to get into this complex was to have a look at the *Konzept Wolf Schweiz* (BAFU 2016), the Swiss national wolf management plan, and its creation. A first version of the plan drafted by the authorities was given into announcement in 2015. The announcement is a phase in the Swiss legislation's preliminary proceedings in which cantons, other federal authorities, political parties, associations, NGOs, interest groups and private persons can comment on the legislative drafts worked out by the authorities. The federal authority responsible received 177 statements in the announcement process of the *Konzept Wolf Schweiz*. This number left me quite helpless at first.

But then – almost in passing – two things happened. Firstly, an environmental journalist I met at a conference for Alpine Studies explained to me that in his view, the forestry sector had not been very well organized and positioned yet regarding the large predator subject. Secondly, some weeks later, my brother told me about a field trip he had done guided by a forestry engineer who expressed himself explicitly and repeatedly in favor of wolves and lynxes and also told the people on the field trip that, in his opinion, the forestry sector had not been commenting on this subject enough yet, but that he and some colleagues are willing to change that. Because of these two 'testimonies,' I started investigating on my own, and the impression was confirmed that the interest group of forestry is currently on its way to forming a voice regarding wolves and positioning that voice publicly and politically. I, therefore, decided to *follow* this trace and to get myself a corresponding Leit-wolf: The 'forestry assistant.' The idea that the wolf may be an assistant to the forestry sector is based on the conviction that wolves, as an element of the forest ecosystem, make a positive impact on browsing damage by reducing the number of game animals and influencing their behavior. A whole field that could be examined ethnographically opened up with this Leit-wolf: Contributions in diverse media from various forestry associations, position papers, studies, people to meet for interviews or to accompany to the woods, Twitter accounts or thematic events (directed either at people working in forestry or the interested public).

I decided, with my *Leit*-wolf 'forestry assistant,' to examine the actor group 'interest groups' and the 'interest game' they play – in external (politics, the general public) and internal contexts (the forestry sector itself) – by doing a case study on this one specific interest group that, in my opinion, is currently in a phase that is revealing for the questions I ask: Formation. The observations I am interested in are, for example, the integration of the wolf figure 'forestry assistant' in a particular understanding of environment as an ecological cycle and how wolves become functionalized in this logic. Consequently, the 'forestry assistant' is also inscribed in significant current discourses, such as climate change (the keyword here is 'tree species diversity'). However, all this is not only about the ecological benefit of wolves for the forest. These considerations are also made in terms of economics, for example, with ideas to calculate the economic benefit of wolves that reduce browsing damage caused by game animals, especially on forests important for absorbing the impact of avalanches and other forces of nature in Swiss alpine regions. Emotional practices are an analytical perspective I put on the data gathered with this Leit-wolf. The ideas just mentioned to calculate the benefit of wolves for the forests in Swiss francs can be read and analyzed as an attempt to de-emotionalize: The sum calculated as a rational and unemotional argument for wolves. But conversely, this interest group is also concerned with creating emotions for the forest and the browsed trees: In an interview with forestry people I did, they discussed why the *Blick* (the Swiss yellow press paper) writes on its front page "wolf massacres sheep" but would never ever make a headline reading "red deer massacre silver firs."

Fig. 15 ***Establishing the 'forestry assistant':*** *small plastic figures arranged by forestry engineers on a guided wolf hiking tour, Photo Elisa Frank*

The Wolf in Dogskin: Expanding the Field

The *Leit*-wolves have an ambivalent effect in terms of limiting the field: They may not only restrict but also expand it, leading me to numerous new sites, actors, discourses and situations that I would never have thought of when starting the research project. I will elaborate on this point with the help of the 'wolf in dogskin.' At the moment, this *Leit*-wolf consists mainly of two blocks of data.

The first block can be described as stories about 'Swiss national figures' or '*Swiss lieux de mémoire*' that integrate the topic of the resemblance between wolf and dog. There are three such figures: Globi (a figure for children), Barry (the Swiss national avalanche dog) and Schellenursli (the protagonist of a famous children picture book). These popular 'national figures' are brought into connection with wolves in different media where the stories of these three figures have been told recently. The medium of interest for Globi is a book and radio drama from 2006, for Barry, a permanent exhibition that opened in the Natural History Museum in Bern in 2014, and for Schellenursli, a movie from 2015. In all three cases, the connection is always made with the help of some kind of 'reversible figure' wolf – dog. A wolf occurs in these recent representations of the stories of Globi, Barry and Schellenursli. A wolf that suddenly turns out to be, behaves like or is perceived as a dog – or the other way around. This material may be analyzed in the direction of integrating the returning wolves into a national Swiss memory – but as I am not that advanced in my work here yet, for the moment, that remains an analytical speculation. The second block I grasp ethnographically with this Leit-wolf is the subject of hybrids, the crossbreeding of wolves and dogs – a politically very 'hot' subject that periodically creates stirs in Switzerland.

All together, these are very heterogeneous sites, ranging from the genetics laboratory to the children's movie. But the common topic that I see in the popular stories of Globi, Barry and Schellenursli, as well as in the debate on hybrids and crossbreeding, is the negotiation of the question: What *is* a wolf? Is it really a wolf that I see, or is it actually a dog (or at least half a dog)? And vice versa. This also concerns questions of the obvious vs. the actual and the obvious that may be deceptive as well as questions of pure/unambiguous vs. hybrid/ambiguous.

If and how much the dog is actually (still) a wolf is a question I also came across in two additional sites: Firstly, when visiting the Swiss dog fair in 2017, I learned about a dog training method called Natural Dogmanship. This method aims at treating dogs appropriately to the species, appropriately to their 'nature.' At the fair, which was dedicated in 2017 to the special topic "Wolf – the dog's ancestor," this dog training method was presented in a live performance where the person explaining it also made reference to the wolf to grasp and understand the dog's 'nature,' saying that a dog is actually, to a large extent, (still) a wolf, to which the dog owner then needs to do justice in designing the dog's everyday life. Secondly, in the frame of a lecture on domestication at the University of Zurich in the autumn of 2017, I attended a talk entitled: "How much wolf is in my dog? Concepts of wildness and naturalness in dog feeding." The veterinary practitioner who gave the lecture talked about dog and wolf nutrition, the history of dog feeding and an idea recently becoming increasingly popular to feed dogs like wolves feed themselves. The corresponding trend is called BARF, an acronym for "biologically appropriate raw food."

Fig. 16 ***Wolf-approved dog food*** *in a pet shop window, Photo Elisa Frank*

As a "'follow the thing' mode of constructing the space of investigation" (Marcus 1995: 108), the *Leit*-wolves have the tendency to expand the field. Marcus writes about the "speculative, open-ended spirit of tracing things in and through contexts" (ibid.: 107). However, the *Leit*-wolves have, in my case, at the same time, a restricting effect, as they are several and, thus, a conscious selection out of potentially many *Leit*-wolves (as I have tried to illustrate with the example of the 'forestry assistant'). However, this ambivalent, simultaneously restricting and expanding character of the tool *Leit*-wolves is, in the end, nothing more than an expression of the fact that the field is not some kind of laid-out pre-existing entity, but something designed by the researcher and the questions he or she raises. In some way, an ethnographic study is, thus, also always incomplete (Marcus 2009: 28 f.; Massmünster 2017: 51).

The *Leit*-wolves can help me in this 'designing work' I have to do, by 'sounding the edges' in a controlled way. They allow me "[to] think unconventionally about the juxtaposed sites that constitute [the] objects of study" (Marcus 1995: 104; cf. also Lindner 2003: 185). Working with the *Leit*-wolves makes it possible for me to discover which actors, institutions, actants, sites, discourses and situations constitute Swiss wolf management (in a broader, extended sense) and how they are connected to each other instead of defining them at the beginning. This is, according to Hess and Tsianos, one of the main interests when doing research in assemblages: "[T]o identify the multitude of actors that are involved in constituting and negotiating" (2010: 256) the research subject.

In the case of the dog training and dog feeding method mentioned that make reference to wolves, I, however, came to the conclusion not to *follow* the *Leit*-'wolf in dogskin' further in this direction. The sites I *follow* the *Leit*-wolves to should, nevertheless, be linked to the focus of our research project, i.e. the return of wolves in Switzerland as a cultural process and the various ways of dealing with these newly arrived nonhuman beings. While I see this as given in the case of the debate on hybrids and the recent representations of Globi, Barry and Schellenursli (when going in the indicated analytical direction of integrating wolves in popular national stories), I am dubious about such a closer link in the case of Natural Dogmanship and BARF. To put it into methodical terms: I do not *follow* the *Leit*-wolves blindly anywhere; it is every time my decision to *follow* a *Leit*-wolf to and gather ethnographic data about a site it can lead me to. This also protects me from a new form of holism that multi-sited ethnography often entails, as it has been criticized, for instance, by social anthropologist Matei Candea (2007). Although the approach stresses the contingency and constructive character of the field, it leads, according to Candea, at the same time, to "an emergent conception of sites as 'found objects'" (2007: 172) when the ethnographer tracks the things to *follow* (e.g. the people, the things, the metaphors, the stories) "as they do the bounding, the localization, and the delimitation" (2007: 172, emphasis in original). That is why Candea pleads for staying aware of "the necessity of *bounding as an anthropological practice*" (2007: 172, emphasis in original), i.e. to denote selections, reflect on them and take on the responsibility for these decisions (2007: 174 f.).

Conclusion

The *Leit*-wolves are the tool I developed – and am still developing further – to research ethnographically the network-like, emergent, complex assemblage in which I am interested in my project. They form a way of constructing the field that allows me, in the words of Hess and Tsianos, "to include a multitude of actors and discourses of which the practices are related to each other, but not in the sense of one central (systemic) logic or rationality, but in the sense of a sphere of negotiation" (2010: 253). Similarly, Marcus talks about the "'worlds apart'" (1995: 102) that can be brought together in a multi-sited ethnography. To me, that is the decisive contribution of the *Leit*-wolves to my study: They allow me to throw light on a multitude of sites that are all involved in the return of wolves in Switzerland and are, therefore, part of wolf management in an extended sense. However, by working with *Leit*-wolves, I do not consider those sites as segmented but am able to analyze their entanglements and interactions without needing to detect one central rationality. In addition, the *Leit*-wolves not only make multi-sites in which the returning wolves are negotiated visible and (ethnographically) graspable, but also the wolf itself as a multi-faceted, hybrid being consisting of manifold dimensions (e.g. biological, scientific, political, historical, narrative, cultural). Hence, the challenge is to describe a body in dialogue with images and ideas and to analyze the simultaneity and relationships of the various dimensions of this animal.

The *Leit*-wolves, by helping me to research networks and figurations continuously and, therefore, to always think in relations, hopefully develop an integrative effect that lets the complexity – regarding multiple sites and a multi-faceted animal – be captured (and represented[7]) instead of dissolved.

7 On the question of how to represent and write down research that has been carried out in an emergent assemblage, cf. Hess and Schwertl (2013: 32); Massmünster (2017: 13, 58–62); Schwertl (2013).

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